

## Prologue

In a certain country, there was a man who was called a 'Hero'.

He had mastered all kinds of weapons, had thrown himself into numerous battlefields without losing, had never once fallen to his knees until the very end of his life, and had repeatedly overturned hopeless situations.

This is why he was called a 'Hero' and was held in awe.

In a certain country, there was a lady who was called a 'Sage'.

She sublimated the technology, sorcery, into a new form called 'Magic', overturned the unfavorable tides of war, and increased the power of the entire country by spreading this new technology, 'Magic'.

This is why she was called a 'Sage' and was praised.

Geniuses of different talents, born in different countries.

If one were to describe their relationship in one word, it would be ——

“—— Yo, you came after all.”

In the midst of the battlefield, the 'Hero' —— Reid Frieden, carries a greatsword that exceeds his height.

Normally, no one would listen to the words of the enemy.

However... the girl floating in the air quietly responded.

“—— Yes. I heard that Reid would be here.”

The girl's voice sounded strangely good, even though it was nothing more but a muffled whisper.

Sitting on her staff, the girl's shiny silver hair flutters in the wind.

She grimaced at the devastation that Reid had created.

“...I can't have you go around destroying all kinds of things.”

“Oh? It can't be helped. Because if you guys secure a supply route, our stronghold will be crushed, and we will be invaded.”

“Yes. That's the goal, after all... I won't let you do whatever you want.”

The moment she said that, countless patterns appeared around the girl.

The ‘Sage’ — Elria Caldwen, has created a new technology called magic.

“I've brought something amazing today.”

“I'm looking forward to it. Will we finally be able to settle the hundreds of battles?”

“Today... it will be the 629th battle.”

“Has it been that many? Thank you for dutifully reminding me every time.”

“...Because Reid forgets every time.”

“I can't help it. Unlike you, I'm an idiot.”

After saying that, Reid points his greatsword at Elria.

“However — since I'm called a ‘Hero’, I will fight like one.”

Looking at Reid's grin, Elria nodded calmly.

“Yeah... I've also been called a ‘Sage’, so I won't lose.”

Seeing the magic circles begin to emit intense light, Reid takes up his greatsword and goes into a battle stance.

This was the daily routine of — the ‘Hero’ and the ‘Sage’, who were called the strongest.

However, the battle between the two is never settled.

And that is because the two were evenly matched.

They fought tirelessly for three days and three nights, but instead of slowing down, their movements grew sharper, almost as if they were enjoying the battle.

Their battle would end when the situation on either side of the war had changed. They would carry the settlement over next time and return to their respective sides to deal with their own forces.

Then they would meet on the next battlefield, and again cross swords and magic.

This is their daily routine, and they have continued to repeat it every time a battle occurs.

The relationship between the 'Hero' and the 'Sage' can be best described in one word by Reid.

*'Rival.'*

The only one to whom he can give his all and fight a battle that he truly enjoys from the bottom of his heart.

And that was Elria Caldwen, the 'Sage'.

However, that relationship would not last forever.

No matter who or what you are, one cannot escape *'Death'*.

Therefore, even these enjoyable battles will come to an end.

Eventually, a conclusion will be made between the two, and it will be decided who is the strongest.

The end came — fifty years after they met.

“— The 'Sage' is dead?”

Reid's wrinkled face contorted as he heard the words from the soldier who had received the message.

“Are you sure about that, Lyatt?”

“Y-Yes...! The information is extremely credible because it is an urgent message sent from a spy who has infiltrated Vegalta...!!”

“Haa... Seriously... I thought I was going to die first.”

Reid blurted out as he ruffled his white hair.

Elria Caldwen was not human.

She was an elf, a long-lived race with a lifespan of several hundred years.

That is why, in the multiple battles they had, Reid assumed that the conclusion of a battle between the two of them would be his own defeat and death, as he was getting on in years and quite worn out.

It was a very awkward way to end the story.

“A-A royal decree was sent to His Excellency Frieden after learning the news of the sage’s death!!”

“What, did they say I'm useless as an old man now that the ‘Sage’ is dead?”

“N-No...”

For a moment, the soldier looks bitter before making his announcement.

“The royal decree from the kingdom, Altein, is... *‘Now that the Sage is dead, you are to take advantage of the chaos and lead your entire army to invade the neighboring country, Vegalta, and end the long war with your power’.*”

The moment he heard those words, Reid was speechless.

“...Hey, you can't be serious about that.”

The soldier cowered in fear as the anger overflowed from Reid.

However, after fixing his posture, the soldier continued to speak with a grim expression on his face.

“...I have been with Your Excellency as your flag-bearer, and I understand how you and the Sage felt when you both fought. And everyone who was present on the battlefield knew that both of you did not want our lives to fall in vain by using your power against us, the powerless.”

Despite the presence of the mighty ‘Hero’ and ‘Sage’, the loss of men in both countries was extremely small compared to past history.

If the ‘Hero’ and the ‘Sage’ wielded their full power, they would inflict tremendous damage on the soldiers.

To avoid that, Reid was engaged in a one-on-one battle with Elria.

And perhaps —— Elria thought the same.

That is why the two fought each other every time a conflict broke out.

This way... they believed that there would eventually be a future in which the two countries that had been at war with each other would come together to make peace and coexist.

However, the wishes of the ‘Hero’ and the ‘Sage’ never came.

The higher-ups from Altein did not understand them at all.

“That's why I'm so frustrated...! We cannot use the death of the great ‘Sage’ who wished for peace with Your Excellency for war! We should instead be mourning her death...!!”

Reid smiled at the soldier who was shedding tears, his wrinkles deeply etched into his face.

“...You've said some pretty nice things there.”

Perhaps the words are sincere.

This soldier and anyone who has seen the battle between the ‘Hero’ and the ‘Sage’ up close would have shared the same feelings.

That is why —— Reid slowly stood up.

“I have to make sure that I convey those words to her.”

Having said that, Reid removes his armor and takes off his gauntlet and gaiters.

“...L-Lord Frieden, what are you going to do?”

“Ah? I’m just going for a walk. I’m too old to be wearing armor.”

Reid then looks at the greatsword leaning against the wall.

As the one and only friend who has fought with the ‘Sage’,

He thrust the greatsword into the ground —

“— I can’t be dressed up for war to meet a friend, right?”

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How that event was described in later times was not known.

But there is one word that was uttered by many along the way.

The ‘Hero’, Reid Frieden, was a true monster.

He broke through the front line, which was under surveillance, fought off the soldiers who went to intercept him all by himself, and headed straight for the royal capital of Vegalta.

However, no one died in the battle.

It was as if it was done to embody the same sentiment as the ‘Sage’.

And so — Reid arrived at the royal capital.

In response to the invasion of the ‘Hero’, the soldiers in the royal capital were defending it with all their might.

“Stop him! If we don’t stop him now —”

However, the soldiers were speechless at the sight of Reid.

Reid turned to them with a sinister smile and said,

“Oh... I’m sorry. I don't have much time left, so please let me through.”

With that, Reid looks straight ahead at the funeral procession.

“I was already prepared for this. The moment I invaded the enemy country...!!”

Step by step, Reid stomped his trembling feet on the ground.

The sound of sticky water echoed with each step.

The blood flowing from his body was tracing a path like a guidepost.

It was truly a figure worthy of being called a wounded beast.

He was bleeding all over, with wounds all over his body. His clothes were as if they were rags, burnt in some places, and stone spears and ice blades created by magic were sticking out of his back and legs.

But still — that didn't stop Reid.

“I'll die the way I want to when I'm done talking to her...!”

Reid tells the soldiers who are standing there, spitting blood from his mouth.

**“SO — DON'T GET IN MY WAY FOR NOW!!”**

He roars like a beast and advances toward the coffin that came into his view.

There was no one to stop the 'Hero' any longer.

Even if he were to die, his figure was imposing.

And finally —

“—Yo, Elria.”

He called out to the 'Sage' lying in the coffin.

But there was no answer to that.

"Hey-hey... are you really dead? You won't just start coming back to life at any moment and fight me?"

Elria lying in the coffin looks beautiful.

She looks the same as when they first met on the battlefield fifty years ago.

The figure of a girl who has never aged.

But her body is motionless.

"Seriously... the guys you raised are too strong. They're not as strong as you, but they use some decent magic. It was difficult to go easy on them so that I wouldn't kill them."

Bleeding from all over, he laughs at Elria, who is still lying in the coffin.

But her eyes never open.

"I knew... you were someone incredible. Unlike me, you are thinking about the future of your country, and so many people are mourning your death."

Reid looks around in his blurred vision.

The people gathered to mourn the death of the great 'Sage'.

All of them were shedding tears over the death of their respected great 'Sage'.

As he gazed at the scene, Reid's vision suddenly began to distort.

"In the end, we couldn't decide who's the stronger one... but I had enjoyed fighting with someone like you for over fifty years..."

He kneels on the ground to relax.

Still, Reid uses his remaining strength to squeeze out words.

"If... we were in a different position —"



The consciousness is fading, and the words are becoming jumbled.

He expresses his long-held feelings for the 'Sage' who has walked with him through the battlefield.

“— I'm sure we could have been friends.”

With a radiant smile on his face, Reid looked up to the heavens.

As the fatigue started to set in, his vision faded to pitch black.

“Maybe... we —”

Before he could finish his words, his body went limp, and he was enveloped in a strange floating sensation.

But Reid himself was satisfied.

He was able to say the words he had held for more than fifty years.

However, he could not say that he had no regrets.

More than fifty years ago, he made a promise to Elria for the first time.

The promise was not fulfilled.

*'Let's settle who is stronger.'*

This was a promise made on the battlefield between the two people who were on different sides of the conflict.

Thinking back on that promise to her —

The 'Hero' — Reid Frieden, died looking up to the heavens.